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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the issues and problems that arise in the transfer process in outdoor management development (OMD) programs. The transfer of learning from the outdoors back to the workplace is a crucial element of OMD. A review of general transfer problems and management development demonstrates that many of the transfer problems associated with OMD are common. It highlights the responsibilities of the client organization in supporting OMD initiatives within the workplace. Specific transfer problems of OMD programs include: (1) inadequate organizational analysis prior to the program; (2) problems related to corporate culture; (3) lack of senior management support; (4) lack of motivation among participants; (5) mismatch between skills in OMD programs and real problems in the workplace; and (6) inadequate reinforcement mechanisms in the workplace. Overcoming these problem areas entails consideration of the organizational characteristics and circumstances of the client and understanding of organizational structures and cultures. For OMD to have a lasting impact on participant organizations and individuals, a thorough consultation with the client organization must be undertaken prior to developing a program. (LP)

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TRANSFER PROBLEMS IN OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

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Abstract

As the popularity of outdoor management development (OMD) grows, review articles have begun to appear in management journals. Most of these, however, are descriptive in character and contain little or no critical comment. In general they leave underdeveloped the crucial elements of OMD which centre around the transfer of learning from the outdoors back to the workplace. This paper examines the issues and problems that can arise in relation to the transfer process. A six element model of effective management development is outlined. The problems that can arise with OMD programs are reviewed in relation to this model and suggestions are made as to how these may be overcome. The paper concludes that for OMD to have a lasting impact on organizations, as well as individuals, a thorough process of consultation with the client organization must be undertaken. In addition aspects of organization development consulting practice could usefully be employed in OMD work.

Introduction

In the last decade there has been a large increase in the number of organisations using outdoor management development (OMD) programs. In a survey of Australian training and development practices in 1991, for example, 23% of organizations surveyed said that they used outdoor management exercises (Collins and Hackmann, 1991).

The processes involved in OMD have now been quite well documented in mainstream management journals (See for example: Chapman and Lumsden, 1983; Cacciope and Adamson, 1988; Arkin, 1991). Whilst containing some useful advice of a general nature about OMD programs, these contributions do not systematically review potential problems relating to OMD programs and how these might be overcome. In particular they leave underdeveloped some of the more crucial elements of the OMD process which centre around the 'transfer' of learning from the outdoor program back to the workplace. More recent contributions published in *The Journal of Experiential Education* have focussed on the general issues concerning transfer (Gass, Goldman and Priest, 1992), the specific issues in relation to the development of appropriate metaphors (Gass, 1991), and the links between OMD and organizational development (OD) initiatives (Flor, 1991).

These contributions are signs of a maturing approach to OMD and a growing reflexiveness amongst practitioners within the field. This paper attempts to develop some of the points made in the references cited above and to combine these with insights from the author's own experience as a provider of OMD programs in Australia. The integrating framework for the paper is a list of headings of general problems which affect all management development initiatives, irrespective of

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their nature. This is a particularly useful starting point for two reasons. First, it demonstrates that many of the transfer problems associated with OMD are not unique. Second, it highlights the responsibilities of the client organization in supporting OMD initiatives within the workplace. However, the points made in this paper highlight the need for a greater reflexiveness amongst OMD providers in relation to the context of the organization that they working for.

General Transfer Problems and Management Development

As Mol and Vermeulen (1988) have noted, six elements must be present if any management development intervention is to be successful. These are:

- Adequate analysis of future organizational needs in terms of management competencies, operational skills required in different jobs within the organization, and personal development needs of the staff.
- Proper 'fit' or congruence between the organizational culture and the development intervention.
- The active participation of top management in the intervention.
- The creation of a desire for development and skills improvement within the organization so that participants in management development initiatives want to improve their skills.
- The applicability of the skills that are developed in a program to situations that are present in the workplace and that are likely to be encountered by participants in their jobs.
- Positive support for the newly learned approach or skills in terms of evaluation, feedback and reward in the workplace

Whilst the above list is sobering for even the most fervent believer in management development, it is instructive to note that only the first and the fifth of the points made above are solely in the hands of the provider. The rest are either within the grasp of senior management within an organization or are, at best, open for negotiation and liaison between the provider and senior management. What this suggests is that the role of the OMD provider must be broadened to include advice and consultantcy in the area of organizational development (OD) if lasting organizational change is an expected outcome from an OMD program. By necessity this will also mean a shift of focus away from outcomes related to performance and competency, or *manager* development, to outcomes related to the organization as a whole or *management* development.

The rest of this paper examines some of the specific problems related to the transfer of learning from OMD programs within the framework of general problems noted above. Each section will highlight some of the problems that can occur and make suggestions as to how these may be overcome in consultation with the client and OD initiatives.

Specific Transfer Problems of OMD Programs and Suggested Solutions

Inadequate organizational analysis prior to the program

There are a number of problems relating to OMD programs which can result from insufficient consultation between the programmer and the client before the program commences. Without adequate consultation there is a danger of unrealistic expectations being created within the client organization or outcomes from the program which bear little relevance to organizational needs.

Some of these problems relate to the nature of OMD programs and the multiple benefits that can flow from them. It is common, for example, to find in the promotional literature for OMD programs the claim that OMD can lead to: improved leadership skills; more effective teams; enhanced problem solving ability; better decision making; more creativity; increased self esteem; higher levels of trust and improved productivity. All of this is true in certain circumstances, but it would be an exceptional program that could deliver all of these benefits simultaneously. This suggests that great care should be taken by providers in precisely defining client program objectives. Furthermore, providers should be 'slow to promise but quick to deliver'. It also suggests that, ideally, providers should have some expertise in diagnosing organizational problems, should be familiar with the literature on organizational structure and should have some management experience of their own.

A related problem is that of 'skills lag' whereby organizations define their training needs on a current analysis of skills required, or even worse retrospectively, instead of thinking about future needs. By the time a training intervention is diagnosed, approved, designed and conducted the needs of the organization may have changed. Virtually every substantial organization in Australia has been through a process of major structural change in the last five years. In many cases there has been more than one 'restructure' and in a few cases the process of change has become a constant feature of organizational life. In addition to structural changes many organizations are adopting new working philosophies which require a total change of mindset for many employees, the current movement towards Total Quality Management being perhaps the most notable example of this. All of this would suggest that providers ought to be asking clients what expectations they will have of their employees in two years time as well as what expectations they have now.

Other problems which can emerge as a result of inadequate consultation with the client are the design of inappropriate metaphors, the lack of context and incorrect sequencing in the program activities. These issues are discussed in a later section of this paper which deals with skills development on OMD programs.

In general the pre-program consultation should be regarded as a crucial part of OMD consulting. Program providers should take as much care with program objectives and design as they do with the physical safety of participants. Furthermore, they should be ethical and knowledgeable enough to suggest alternative forms of intervention if the organizational problem does not warrant an OMD program.

Problems related to corporate culture

A generic problem for OMD programs is that of 'exoticism' whereby few people in business know exactly what is involved in OMD programs. Managers may know something about the activities of an OMD program, but it is likely that they will not be familiar with the underlying philosophy of OMD and the implications of this for their organizations. This is becoming less of a problem these days because of the proliferation of OMD users, but is still common.

The lack of knowledge about what is involved in OMD is, more often than not, accompanied by a lack of consideration of the fit between OMD and the culture of the client organization. For example, nearly every manager will agree that leadership (and leadership training) is important, but far fewer will have a conceptual model of leadership which recognises how situational determinants influence leadership style. This can lead to problems whereby managers are happy to support their staff to go on OMD programs focussed around leadership, but they are not prepared to alter their own (often top down) leadership style to accommodate this when the staff return to the organization

determined to change 'the way things are done around here'.

Even without the resistance of individual managers, implementing culture change within organizations is notoriously difficult. In fact the very idea of the 'manageability' of culture is a contentious one in the organizational studies literature (see Dunford (1992) for a review). This makes it all the more important to be aware of any cultural incompatibilities before OMD is initiated. In order to ascertain what type of culture exists within an organization and whether of not it is likely to be congruent with an OMD program, consideration needs to be given to a diagnosis of culture. According to Dunford (1992, p. 183) diagnosis of culture can be made through an analysis of themes, an analysis of elements or a combination of the two. An analysis of themes would involve a look at factors such as:

- The degree of autonomy given to employees
- The degree to which productivity is encouraged or restricted
- Whether conflict is suppressed or dealt with openly
- The degree to which information is shared or withheld
- Whether the organization is customer driven
- Whether criticism of the organization is encouraged or discouraged
- Whether innovation is rewarded
- The extent of hierarchical organizational practices
- The level of employee participation in decision making
- Whether team work is encouraged and rewarded or emphasis placed on individual action
- Whether long term thinking is encouraged or people are valued for "fire fighting"

Alternatively, the culture of an organization may be analysed through a focus on the elements of culture such as: language, stories and myths, ritual and ceremony, behavioural norms, managerial practices, physical layout, and organizational beliefs. According to Dunford (1992, p. 184) the combination of themes and elements can be used to form a culture analysis matrix.

By undertaking some form of culture diagnosis before commencing an OMD program, managers and providers reduce the risk of philosophical incompatibility between the program and the organization. The problems presented by, for example, autocratic or risk averse cultures can thus be easily identified and addressed. This process will also lead to the early identification of problems of paradigm acceptance amongst likely program participants.

Another potential problem in the area of organizational culture is the existence of different and competing sub-cultures within organizations. In most cases it is a fallacy to talk about organizational culture as though it is an integrating set of values which binds all organizational members together. Instead it is more accurate to refer to sub-cultures within an organization and recognise that "the culture of the organization" reflects the values and beliefs of the dominant sub-culture.

In many ways the ideal type of group for OMD work is a group that works together within the organization since the group will have its own sub-culture. This sub-culture may or may not correspond with the overall organizational culture but in any event the fact that the group will be together upon return to the workplace means that it will be able to maintain its support mechanisms and any unique ways of interacting that it has developed during the program.

Of course it may well be that the whole purpose of an OMD program is to help break down sub-cultures within an organization and to bring about more integration. This is exactly the purpose

of a program that this author is currently involved with. In this case OMD is being used to try to break down barriers between four groups of employees who previously worked for separate organizations but who, as a result of a merger, now have to work together. Alternatively, it may be that the purpose of an OMD program is to transform an existing dominant culture, in which case the problem of cultural compatibility does not arise. However, if it is the case that OMD is being used as part of a culture change program, then the support of senior managers within the organization is vital if it is to succeed.

Lack of senior management support

The reason why senior managers need to be involved in and supportive of OMD programs is that they are generally the shapers of the dominant sub-culture of the organization as has already been noted. Ultimately, it is not trainers who change organizational culture, but senior managers.

It would appear then that a vital part of the briefing for an OMD program is to ascertain the intentions and motivation of senior managers, or the managers responsible for the organizational unit where the development is to take place, in relation to attendance at the program. This is especially true of OMD programs because of their experiential nature and their transformative potential. Shared meaning and culture comes about through shared experiences. Therefore managers must have the experiences to share the group meaning. Moreover, it is well established in the management literature that group behaviour will be heavily influenced by the style of their manager. Groups tend to do as managers do; not as they say!

There are many reasons why managers cannot or will not attend OMD programs and this has to be recognised as a fact of life. However, the role of the trainer or OMD provider is to clearly spell out to managers the consequences of their non-attendance and encourage them to become involved. This may entail a role for the provider in educating the client in terms of OMD philosophy and practice. It also suggests that the ideal way to run a program within an organization is to 'cascade' from the top of the organization downwards. Getting senior managers onto the program first will also help with the next problem; that of unmotivated program participants.

Unmotivated participants on OMD programs

Some of the common reasons for lack of motivation on the part of program participants are:

- Fear of physical injury/strain/embarrassment
- Fear of the unknown
- Fear of self disclosure
- Fear of judgement/evaluation - particular problem for senior managers
- Lack of self esteem
- Inhibitions related to race, sex, education or other social factors.

Many of these can be overcome by adequate pre-program briefing and good program design and delivery. For a summary of program design points see Buller, Cragun and McEvoy (1991) and Gass, Goldman and Priest (1992).

A more difficult barrier to effective transfer of outdoor programs relates to participants in programs who have individual behaviour or learning styles which are not suited to OMD programs. Honey and Mumford have developed an influential typography of learning styles which identifies four styles: activists, pragmatists, reflectors and theorists. Intuitively, it would appear that the activist

and pragmatist style of learners are more likely to be attracted to the type of learning that can come from OMD programs, whereas reflectors and theorists are more likely to be skeptical. One strategy adopted by this author and colleagues in relation to skeptical participants, is to structure into the program a number of short sessions on management theories of leadership, team building and personal development. Whilst this takes time away from the process of experiential learning, it serves to help participants who require a more formal elaboration of theory as well as a giving all participants an opportunity to think explicitly and concretely about the links between the way they conceptualise the world and the way that they act. In the same way, providing participants with a choice of theoretical models can be useful in demonstrating to them the usefulness of 'reframing' (Bolman and Deal;1991) organizational practices to allow the utility of different perspectives to be judged.

The development of skills in OMD programs which do not mirror real problems in the workplace

According to Gass (1991) transfer of learning from experiential education programs can occur at three levels:

- Specific transfer - which occurs when skills are learned which can be directly translated into another situation (e.g. listening).
- Non-specific transfer - which occurs when processes of learning are generalised into attitudes which the learner will make use of at some time in the future (e.g. tolerance of others).
- Metaphoric transfer - which occurs when processes in one learning situation serve as an analogy for learning in another situation (e.g. learning to take risks at work as a result of an abseiling experience).

Participants in OMD programs can learn on all three levels, although the most important of these is metaphoric transfer. For this to work effectively the metaphors must be set in an appropriate context so that program participants can easily make the link between the activity and an analogous situation in the workplace. Moreover, according to De Shazer and Minuchin (cited in Gass, 1991, p. 7) the metaphors should also be 'isomorphic' (ie contain equivalent structures and similar features to real situations that the participants will encounter in the workplace). Bacon (cited in Gass, 1991, p. 7) has argued that four key elements must be present in order for a metaphor to be effective in therapeutic situations. These are that the metaphor must:

- Be able to hold the participants attention
- Have a different, successful, ending to a real life situation
- Be isomorphic
- Contain enough detail to facilitate the participants 'transderivational search' (ie the participant can attach personal meaning to the situation).

Applying these principles to corporate programs highlights two clear needs in terms of program design and facilitation. First, the use of 'off the shelf' activities which are not properly contextualised is not going to facilitate metaphoric transfer. Care needs to be taken in the contextualisation and sequencing of activities in order to encourage participants to make the links between activities and the workplace. Second, the actions required for successful completion of the program activity should be isomorphic to those required for success in the workplace. Third, the process of debriefing should ultimately focus on the isomorphic nature of actions on the program and actions in the workplace. All of this again emphasises the importance of the consultant being aware in detail of the client organizations training needs and organizational dynamics

Inadequate reinforcement mechanisms in the workplace

Flor (1991, p. 31) has noted the stereotypical differences between OMD and OD. These are reproduced in Table 1.

Table 1: A Comparison of Experiential Education and OD Characteristics

Experiential Education	*Organization Development*
• focus on individual-group experience	• focus on organization
• short-term relationship with client	• long-term relationship with client
• individual takes home new perspective and/or skills that empowers them to better live in a system which is not necessarily seen as changing	• focus on changing the organization's culture by affecting group(s)
• need to know individual and group psychology	• change must occur in the system (or sub-system) to support change in group or individual
• informal process of assessment prior to planning course or program	• need to know organization psychology and culture
• espoused methods of change generally more 'normative' in nature ie 'we know what they need, more challenge, risk taking etc...'	• formal needs assessment of organization and subsystems done prior to planning
• tends to be 'off the shelf' training	• may be 'normative' or 'situational' in nature ie 'what is needed depends'
• works primarily with newly formed groups of strangers	• more 'customised' training
• staff often see self as different from client, especially corporate clients, rather than seeking and acknowledging similarities; sometimes leading to a 'we-they' perspective	• works primarily with existing groups or co-workers
• little or no follow-up and evaluation	• planning actively involves the client, collaborative in nature
	• follow-up and evaluation built into action plan

The main differences between OMD and OD are the long term nature of the OD process, the effect of OD on the organization as a whole, and the emphasis in OD on changing organizational culture (Flor, 1991, p. 31). In line with this, individuals who have participated in OMD programs (no matter how successful), may expect to experience a number of 're-entry' problems as they return to the workplace. Some of the more common ones are:

- The 'return from space' effect - whereby the new ways of understanding self and organization developed by the individual on the program are brought back to the same environment and the same work relationships which previously existed. The person may have changed but the workplace may be exactly as it was before. In these circumstances it is difficult for people to maintain new approaches which they committed to on the program.

- The 'hangover effect' where people returning from OMD programs become bored and disillusioned because work life is not as exiting and interesting as life on the program. (It is not unknown for OMD programs to stimulate resignations, divorces and other major life changes).

- The 'widows and orphans effect' whereby the support of a nurturing environment which encourages openess, honesty, risk taking etc., is replaced by cynicism, conservatism and political manipulation back in the workplace.

Much can be done by providers to facilitate and narrow the re-entry process of individuals back to the workplace. First, participants should be advised to initially set themselves modest and specific goals which are achievable in the short term. Second support mechanisms such as 'buddy systems', follow up meetings and alumni associations can prevent the abandonment of goals as a result of isolation. Third, photographs and icons of the program, badges and T-shirts can all help to celebrate the program and remind participants of their feelings during different activities. All of these can ease the process of transition and assist the transfer of learning back to the workplace.

In addition, though, there is also a need to put in place structures to ensure that the impact of OMD programs is tracked at an individual, group and organizational level. In order for this to occur, more formal evaluation of programs needs to be established as a normal feature of OMD programs. This is difficult because, in general, the outcomes of OMD programs are holistic in character and therefore hard to assess in any quantifiable way. Probably the best method of evaluating the impact on individuals is that of 'triangulation'. This involves a combination of self-assessment (or peer assessment), subordinate assessment and supervisor assessment of a limited range of core competencies which have been established as desired outcomes of the program. However, this is costly, time consuming and potentially threatening to the individual under assessment. Potential methods for group performance assessment would include aspects of the above as well as more quantifiable measures such as output rates, reject rates, downtime and other measures associated with the Total Quality Management approach. However, this is also expensive to initiate though, and requires the acceptance of a measurement philosophy for group and organizational outcomes.

Clearly, evaluation on any basis other than the traditional anecdotal and 'happy sheet' methods is a fairly major undertaking in its own right. This should be made clear to the client organization at the time that the objectives of the program are formulated and the desired outcomes specified.

The fact that the outcomes of OMD programs tend to be focussed mainly on individuals rather than groups or organizations represents perhaps the biggest single obstacle to the transfer of learning from OMD programs to the workplace. What this indicates is the need for a closer alignment between the OD and OMD approaches to ensure that OMD initiatives are integrated into some of the more global processes involved in OD initiatives. Without changes in the culture of organizations to make them more supportive of the general philosophy of OMD programs, there is always a high probability that individuals will be in for a 'hard landing' and that the transfer of learning from program to organization will be impeded.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined some of the problems that can arise with OMD programs. Six major problem areas have been identified and suggestions have been made about how some of these may be overcome. In particular it has been suggested that for OMD to become more effective more consideration needs to be given to the organizational characteristics and circumstances of the client.

This in turn has suggested a wider role for OMD providers in the corporate arena and a move to take on board some of the traditional concerns of the organizational development movement. This has implications for the skills base of OMD providers and suggests a need for a greater understanding of organizational structures and cultures.

Without attention to these wider processes OMD providers will probably remain involved in *manager* development but not *management* development in its fullest sense. Individual managers may improve their effectiveness as a result of OMD programs This in itself may be useful in the short run but it may well be ineffective in the long term because the changes that individuals make may prove to be incompatible with the overall culture and structure of the organization and will ultimately come into contradiction with them.

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